



MEMORANDUM

To: State Board of Education & Early Development
Date: October 8-9, 2025

Thru: Deena Bishop Ed.D, Commissioner
Telephone: (907) 269-4583

From: Division of Innovation and Education Excellence
Subject: Agenda 8.0A Division of Innovation and Education Excellence Standing Report

Division of Innovation and Education Excellence 2025 Board Report

The Division of Innovation and Education Excellence (IEE) is dedicated to providing an excellent education for every student every day by focusing division efforts around the five priorities of the [Alaska Education Challenge](#); providing oversight of state and federally funded programs to ensure quality and equity of student services; and providing technical assistance and support to districts statewide.

Career and Technical Education

- Applications for federal Perkins CTE funds are being submitted and approved for the 2025-26 school year. As of September 1st, applications have been submitted and approved for 19 school districts. DEED staff continue to contact and support the remaining districts as they submit plans and apply for funds.
- The annual Alaska Career Guide Training was held in Anchorage September 3-5, 2025. Partners on the project include Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Sealaska Heritage Institute, Bristol Bay Regional Career and Technical Education Program, and RootEd Alliance.
- The Alaska Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) is hosting the annual CTE 2025 Professional Development Conference October 12-15, 2025 at the Hotel Captain Cook in Anchorage. This year will focus on collaboration with Alaska's Workforce Future Plan and industry outreach work by Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Data and Accountability

- The summer OASIS data collection was closed on July 15, 2025. This is one of several annual collections that the Data Team manages. The summer OASIS collection assists in

the reporting of student demographics and allows DEED to calculate accountability indicators including the graduation cohorts. It also supports reporting required by the Alaska Reads Act.

- The Data Team collaborated with the Assessments Unit and IT to ensure the timely publication of accurate assessment data. The team participated in a review process for AK STAR and the Alaska Science Assessment prior to the distribution of reports to the districts on July 28th. Prior to the public release, the statewide calculations were completed, reviewed for accuracy, and then released to IT for publication.

The assessment data was published September 5th, and can be viewed here: [2025 Assessment Results - Education and Early Development](#)

Early Learning

- Review of applications for Early Education Program Approval and .5 Average Daily Membership (EEP-ADM Application) was completed
 - 12 applications were submitted
 - 12 applications were approved
 - There are now 13 total districts approved
 - Annette Island
 - Bering Strait
 - Chatham
 - Fairbanks North Star Borough
 - Kenai Peninsula Borough
 - Ketchikan
 - Mat-Su
 - North Slope Borough
 - Petersburg
 - Skagway
 - Southeast Island
 - Valdez
- Training and professional development were offered to districts and Head Start programs throughout the month of August to prepare for the new school year
 - Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ-3) developmental screen: 80 teachers and administrators attended one or more ASQ trainings in August.
 - Teaching Strategies GOLD: four virtual training opportunities and one in-person training in Soldotna. First in a series of monthly support meetings.
 - Support meetings for grantees and 0.5 ADM recipients
- The pre-elementary program goals have been updated. They can be accessed from the [Early Learning Programs Home Page](#).
- Becky Moren, Early Learning Administrator, resigned.

ESEA Federal Programs

- DEED ran a competitive request for applications for federal 21st Century Community Learning Center funds that resulted in over \$3.2 million in awards to provide out-of-school time programming in the following six districts: Anchorage, Dillingham, Fairbanks, Galena, Mat-Su, and Nenana. These awards were promised to be renewed annually for the next five years, dependent upon congressional appropriation of funds. DEED plans to run a similar request for applications this year.

- DEED helped eligible districts apply for over \$700,000 in federal ESEA Title V Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) funds.
- DEED is currently examining data to determine eligible finalists for the Title III-A Distinguished District Award (additional funds provided to the three highest-performing Title III-A districts, based on Accountability data for the English learner (EL) subgroup).
- In collaboration with DEED's Assessments Team and Content Specialists, the EL/III-A Program Manager has begun the process of determining the alignment between the State's English Language Proficiency Standards ([WIDA's ELD Standards Framework, 2020 Ed.](#)) and DEED's Content Standards.
- During the 2024-25 school year, DEED's Title I-C Migrant Education Program staff and stakeholders from across Alaska met to identify the needs of Alaska's migratory children. The final [Comprehensive Needs Assessment report](#) was finalized in June 2025. During the fall of 2025, DEED will continue to meet with the stakeholder working group to develop a State Service Delivery Plan that addresses the identified needs of migratory children and will drive the allowable uses of Title I, Part C Migrant Education Program funds for Alaska's school districts.
- In coordination with the Teacher Certification Administrator, Data team, and IT team, the Title II-A Program Manager has scheduled webinar opportunities for districts to support the Educator Evaluation, First Day Vacancy, and Certified and Classified Staff Accounting data collection processes.
- DEED has established a cycle of district, DEED, and guest presentations to support homeless liaisons through monthly meetings and annual trainings with the goal of increasing engagement and understanding of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Health & Safety

- The Health and Safety team coordinated with members of the ESEA Federal Programs, School Recognition and Support, Special Education, and Teaching and Learning teams to launch the Reducing Chronic Absenteeism initiative. September was Attendance Awareness month. DEED launched a statewide campaign to help address chronic absenteeism in our schools at the Superintendent Fly-in in July.
 - A student who misses 10% of the school year—or approximately two days per month—for any reason is considered chronically absent. Alarming, this affects more than 40% of students across the state each year. When students miss school, they miss out on learning, meaningful relationships, and countless other opportunities that are crucial for development and future success.
 - To combat this issue, DEED introduced the "[Strive for 5 – Attend School All Week!](#)" campaign to raise awareness about the importance of regular school attendance and provide resources to schools and districts to help reduce chronic absenteeism across the state.

As part of this campaign, DEED will be providing:

- The [Addressing Chronic Absenteeism](#) webpage in a multi-tiered system of support format
- An easy start district toolkit with informational sheets for schools to use and share with families and communities
- Community of Practice sessions once a month to share ideas from statewide and national resources. The first Community of Practice will be Oct. 7.

- The DEED Safety & Well Being Summit, “All Hands On Deck,” was held Sept. 10-11, 2025 in Anchorage at the Egan Center. Educational leaders, key staff, and strategic stakeholders from every district across the state came together to strengthen school safety and well-being in Alaska. Together, they learned and shared best practice strategies to promote healthy development and positive school engagement. For more information please visit <https://akschoolsafetyandwellbeing.com/>

School Recognition and Support

- Reviews for the FY26 School Improvement Application are currently underway. The team is providing detailed feedback to school districts to ensure their applications meet all requirements and can be approved. This process is crucial for helping schools secure the funding and support needed to implement their improvement plans effectively.
- The Quality Schools Application process began with technical assistance provided to districts in June and July. This support was followed by preliminary application reviews. The goal of this early review was to offer initial guidance and help districts refine their submissions before final evaluations.
- The School Improvement Team recently partnered with the Health & Safety Team to deliver a presentation at the September Health and Safety Summit. This collaboration highlights the interconnectedness of academic improvement and a safe, healthy learning environment. The joint effort focused on how a school's overall climate, including its health and safety protocols, impacts student success and school-wide performance.
- The School Improvement Team continues to offer comprehensive guidance and information to schools identified under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for additional state support.

Special Education

- Statewide Special Education Software (Embrace® Rollout) - A pilot rollout of Embrace® is underway with seven smaller districts and the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. The team thanks Fairbanks for hosting and leading software and data collection adjustments. Special recognition goes to Jamie Carroll and Joseph Hannah under the leadership of Director Kate Hall.
- The department is piloting software from LeaderServices to streamline compliance reviews. If successful, it may allow for a streamlined monitoring cycle, reducing district burden and automating processes. A trial launch is planned for the 2026–27 school year.
- In collaboration with the Commissioner’s Office, work has begun to examine the feasibility of a tribal-based school under Alaska’s special school provision. Options under review include a charter model, special school designation, or the creation of a new district. Initial review began in late August with Commissioner’s Office and legal staff support.
- Weekly meetings with special education directors have resumed for 2025–26. Established during COVID-19, the meetings continue to provide value and are held each Wednesday at 8:00 a.m. as open hours to support district needs.
- The SPED team continues to recommend regulatory updates to improve clarity and reduce burdens:
 - 4 AAC 52.250 and 4 AAC 52.252 – Amendments to allow video conferencing for supervisory requirements and potentially require monthly supervision of staff delivering services.

- 4 AAC 52.130(i)(1)(B) – Revision to remove the word “*physical*” from the definition of vision impairment to avoid unintentionally excluding neurological conditions.

These proposals focus on simplification and operational efficiency with fiscal benefits for districts.

Standards and Assessment

- The Assessment Team facilitated the successful release of statewide assessment results for the 2025 administration on September 5th, including the summative Alaska System of Academic Readiness (AK STAR) and Alaska Science Assessment results. The team is now preparing for the 2026 administration by working with Alaskan educators to review data and items for the Spring assessment.
- In addition to supporting educators through the data and item review process, the Content Specialists have provided back to school professional development for a number of different districts and are offering classes through the University of Alaska system to support quality standards instruction.

Teacher Certification

- Teacher Certification continues to advance its services and system improvements to better support educators and districts across Alaska.
- Andy Gillilan recently joined the team as an Education Specialist, focusing on system efficiencies, software enhancements, and application processing support during peak periods. Andy is supporting districts with AK Reads Act endorsement needs and provides direct support to districts navigating certification requirements.
- The total processing time for certification applications is approximately 4–5 weeks, which is a significant accomplishment during the busiest months of certification processing.
- Over the past three months, four new districts have been added to the Registered Teacher Apprentice Program, and 23–27 apprentices are anticipated to register in the Fall 2025 cohort. DEED has been finalizing tools and resources to support mentors, apprentices, and districts throughout the apprenticeship year.
- After 14 years of service to the Teacher Certification Team, and 29 years of State of Alaska service, Justine Bishop has retired from the Team. DEED thanks Justine for her dedicated service, especially the work she completed the past three years to support the transition from paper-based to online certification processes.

Teaching & Learning and Academic Support

- The Academic Support and Teaching & Learning Team continue to advance statewide literacy efforts through the Alaska Reads Act and aligned federal initiatives. All districts are submitting updated District Reading Improvement Plans (DRIPs) / Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS), as required under the Reads Act. The revised template provides clearer guidance, including a dedicated section on student attendance and a component for longitudinal data review, both of which are essential for monitoring progress and strengthening reading outcomes.
- The Department Reading Program (DRP) is entering its second year, expanding support to 50 schools across seven districts during the 2025–26 school year. Reading specialists will deliver intensive, data-informed support to schools through goal setting, coaching, and targeted reading plans, Intensive School Reading Improvement Plans (ISRIPs), ensuring direct alignment to the priorities of the Alaska Reads Act.

- The Virtual Learning Consortium (VLC) continues to grow, offering expanded access to professional learning that supports the Reads Act requirements and beyond. Newly developed asynchronous courses provide educators with flexible options to complete K–3 Teacher, Administrator, and Early Education Lead endorsements. Additional offerings in evidence-based literacy instruction and data-driven practices allow educators across Alaska to engage in training at their own time, place, and pace.
- The Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant further extends and strengthens the Alaska Reads Act by providing federal resources to advance literacy from birth through grade 12. Through this grant, DEED is facilitating subgrant opportunities that support districts in implementing comprehensive, coordinated literacy plans. Subgrantees are leveraging budgets to strengthen early learning and extend literacy efforts into secondary grades, which includes accessing vetted high-dosage tutoring and evidence-based professional development to ensure a cohesive, statewide approach to literacy improvement.